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NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

KOSOVO & THE TRINITY:

MISMATCHED STRATEGY  
AND THE EXPECTATIONS FOR SUCCESS

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Another conflict threatens to spew out of the volatile Balkans. Rebels in the Kosovo province of Serbia in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are demanding autonomy. President Milosevic's force has cracked down bloodily in an area they have long oppressed. Civilians are caught up in the conflict, actively targeted by both sides. A humanitarian crisis has seen 300,000 refugees flee to the hills for protection. Winter approaches. Efforts to ease the tensions by the European community have been largely ineffective. NATO, led by the United States, has taken the lead. United Nations' Security Council resolutions condemn the violence on both sides and demand a withdrawal of Serbian army units. NATO has issued an ultimatum for Serbian compliance and has threatened punitive airstrikes. Strategists have outlined courses of action and the target sets have been determined. Warplanes sit poised in Italy and Hungary ready to strike. Tensions mount.

This paper's thesis is that the United States is about to become embroiled in a conflict whose character runs contrary to the type of conflict the American public is willing to commit to. Additionally, the apparent choice of military strategy does not seem to be clearly linked to accomplishing the political objectives, and offers both Serb and Albanian many courses of action to negate our strategy. The paper begins with a brief historical background of the conflict.

Balkan history is long and proud, accented with political strife and bloody conflict. Kosovo, a small region in the Balkans, has all these challenges: ethnic and religious hatred, centuries of conflict, and political oppression. Former U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia Warren Zimmerman has observed,

The competing claims of Serbs and Albanians have been hopelessly tangled in the webs of history and myth. [T]he main issue is as simple as it is intractable.

The Serbian claim is based primarily on the historical-cultural principle -- the Jerusalem argument. The Albanian claim to independence is based largely on the demographic principle -- the majority argument. Since these claims are mutually incompatible, there is little reason to believe that Kosovo will be easy to solve.<sup>1</sup>

Carl von Clausewitz, in his epic work, *On War*, explains that war, as a "true chameleon," is shaped by and must adapt to a "paradoxical trinity" of passion, reason, and chance, domains dominated by the people, the government, and the army.<sup>2</sup> The motives and historical situations which have bred the conflict in Kosovo must be understood by both the statesman and commander if war (or military action), as an instrument of policy, can hope to be effective. To that end, we explore these domains.

### **The Kosovar Trinity & Their Objectives**

Ethnic Albanian Kosovars, have historically clashed with the Slavs. A minority group within the Republic of Serbia, Albanians make up a 90% majority in Kosovo, a subordinate province. Long an oppressed class, life had been tolerable with relative day-to-day autonomy granted by Tito, the Yugoslav president, in 1946 when he made Kosovo an "autonomous region" within Serbia. Relative independence lasted basically until 1989 when now-President Milosevic revoked the freedoms with a series of "emergency measures." Frustration grew as the Kosovars, especially the youth, saw no improvement in their lives. A more aggressive course of action, however, would have to wait an increase in funds and until weapons could be found with which to take the offensive.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Zimmerman, "The Demons of Kosovo," *National Interest* 52 (Sum 98) 10, quoted in Gary T. Demsey, "Washington's Kosovo Policy: Consequences and Contradictions," (8 Oct 98). Comments were found at [www.suc.org](http://www.suc.org), published by the Canadian-based Serbian Unity Congress.

<sup>2</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) p. 88-89.

Along came the 1997 Albanian civil war. The Albanian army lost control of their armories and "suddenly a million Kalashnikovs were on sale for \$15 each"<sup>3</sup>. The mountainous Kosovo/Albanian border provided an easy conduit, and soon the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was armed. Money poured in from Albanian emigres. The stage was set -- a long-suffering people had grown tired of their second-class status and a flood of weapons were put into the hands of the unemployed masses, creating a crude army. The simmering Balkan conflict would soon boil over, providing just the excuse Milosevic needed to shore up his power base with ultra-nationalistic hardliners and providing an international spotlight once again in a troubled area.

The main political objective of both the KLA and shadow president Ibrahim Rugova is independence. Some say the ultimate objective is a Greater Albania<sup>4</sup>, others would be content with a return of autonomous rule and self-determination. The rebels' secondary political demands are

- a. Withdrawal of all Serbian government forces from the province
- b. Halt to all arrests of suspected guerrillas
- c. Release of "political prisoners"
- d. Investigations of "crimes against humanity" committed by Serbian forces

Failure to fulfill those demands will impose on [the Kosovo Liberation Army] the continuation of the war for freedom, independence and democracy<sup>5</sup>.

The prime military objective the KLA has chosen to reach the above political objectives is to target Milosevic's police and military force, as well as ethnic Serbs living in Kosovo, by small-scale guerrilla action. By killing these people, the rebels hope to

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Judah, "Impasse in Kosovo," from *The New York Review of Books* (New York), Vol 45, Issue 15, p 4-6, 8 Oct 98

<sup>4</sup> "Greater Albania" refers to the joining of ethnic Albanians from the countries of Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Greece with those in Albania. Obviously, it also implies the amalgamation of some of the aforementioned land areas into a large Albanian state.

<sup>5</sup> Tomi Cohen, "Milosevic Told He Hasn't Met NATO Demands," *Washington Post*, 21 Oct 98 A26

provoke a government crackdown against ethnic Albanians to radicalize the Kosovo population and bring international attention to the KLA's political objectives<sup>6</sup> Optimally, the international community would then assist the Albanian goal of independence. If this does not happen, the rebels military strategy will have turned the conflict into a "people's war," the only way such a small and relatively weak force can hope to prevail over the Serbian government strength

### **The Serbian Trinity & Their Objectives**

"Kosovo is to the Serbs as Jerusalem is to the Jews"<sup>7</sup> No single statement better expresses the passion of ethnic Serbs for the Kosovo land. The province is viewed as the cradle of Serbian culture and history, possessing 75 percent of all cultural and national monuments<sup>8</sup> The depth of this generation's ethnic hatred was expressed by Serbian student protests against reopening state education to Albanians, "Ne Dajte im olovku!" literally "Don't give them pencils!"<sup>9</sup> In the trinity construct, Serbian passion threatens to deepen the conflict by its "primordial violence, hatred, and enmity"<sup>10</sup>

The government portion of the trinity is also easy to summarize. Yugoslavia President Slobodan Milosevic is an authoritarian ruler who has used the brutal suppression of Kosovo separatists to unify ethnic Serbs and shore up support among dissatisfied hardliners. "Reason" pulls on the trinity because international law clearly recognizes Kosovo as part of the Yugoslav state

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<sup>6</sup> In Drenica, government forces massacred 75 ethnic Albanians last March, an event that "transformed thousands of angry ethnic Albanian civilians into armed rebels fighting for Kosovo's independence." From R. Jeffrey Smith, "Belgrade Steps Up Pullback in Kosovo," Washington Post, 27 Oct 98, A01

<sup>7</sup> Dr Roy W. Stafford of the National War College faculty, interview by author, 23 Oct 98. I am indebted to Dr Stafford for this discussion which helped me place the conflict within the larger historical context

<sup>8</sup> International Crisis Group, Kosovo Spring. The International Crisis Group Guide to Kosovo (Brussels ICG, 98), p. 3, as quoted in Dempsey, "Washington's Kosovo Policy: Consequences and Contradictions"

<sup>9</sup> Tihomir Loza, "Kosovo Albanians: Closing the Ranks," Transitions, May 98, p. 23

<sup>10</sup> Clausewitz, p. 89

The domain of the army finds a vastly superior force of 50,000 police and army troops to combat the 1,000 armed Kosovar rebels. They possess tanks, heavy artillery, and the almighty cigarette lighter. The concept of "chance" plays out as they set fire to homes and destroy villages -- do they succeed in their goal of breaking the bond of the people to the guerrillas or do they help further the KLA's desire of a "people's war"?

The main Serbian political objective is to retain Kosovo as a province. Additionally, Milosevic is using this situation to fan nationalist fires, calling for domestic unity against an internal secessionist threat as well as an international conspiracy against the Serbs. To accomplish his political objective, government forces desire to crush the independence movement in Kosovo by killing KLA rebels and punishing the ethnic Albanian population. The goal of the punishment, played out in civilian massacres and the destruction of villages, is to remove the support of the people from the rebel army.

### **NATO Objectives**

Ethnic conflict and political repression have long simmered in the Serbian province of Kosovo. Low-level violence stayed below the "international interest" threshold until recently armed KLA rebels brought down the wrath of Milosevic's forces. In the spring of 1998, atrocities highlighted by the international media finally prodded NATO and the UN to act. They levied economic and political sanctions and embargoed arms, but the violence continued to escalate. As the KLA became more politically sophisticated, they played the media to better focus that harsh spotlight.<sup>11</sup> The UN issued

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<sup>11</sup> Each side in the conflict even established their own web sites. See [www.kosova-state.org](http://www.kosova-state.org) for the pro-independence view and [www.serbia-info.com](http://www.serbia-info.com) for Milosevic's position. Two relatively balanced sites are the Canadian-based Serbian Unity Congress web page, [www.suc.org](http://www.suc.org), and the Serb Orthodox Church and the Serbian Democratic Movement in Kosovo page at [www.kosovo.com](http://www.kosovo.com). I was pointed to this information by Vesna Peric-Zimonjic, "Kosovo Combatants Fight New War - In Cyberspace," IPS, 7 Aug 98. This piece was found using the AltaVista search engine and the origin of the article is undetermined.

two Security Council resolutions<sup>12</sup> NATO handed Milosevic an ultimatum that demanded compliance, threatening military action

The international community has three political objectives in Kosovo. The first is to end the ethnic violence that threatens the fragile Balkan stability. The second goal is to prevent a growing humanitarian crisis of displaced persons, allowing the return home of over 300,000 people. Finally, the resolutions call for a political dialogue between Milosevic and the Kosovars to return the Albanians to some form of autonomy.<sup>13</sup>

The military objective selected to accomplish the ends listed above is to threaten NATO airstrikes. What is the strategy's expected linkage between weapons, targets, and effects to compel the enemy to conform to our political will? NATO's apparent strategy is one of either denial or punishment. Denial would seek to target military forces to reduce Milosevic's capability for oppressing the Kosovars. A punishment strategy would seek to push Milosevic past his psychological breaking point by threatening his military power base.

Using the following "military force to political objective" linkage,

**Force > Targets > Mechanism > Political Change<sup>14</sup>**

I will hypothesize the probable courses of action and likely result. I will also briefly list possible branches and sequels that could follow from the proposed action.

*Airpower > Military assets in Kosovo > **Denial** > Milosevic unable to militarily threaten Kosovo to accomplish his objectives so he submits to NATO demands*

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<sup>12</sup> Resolution 1160, 31 Mar 98, and Resolution 1199, 23 Sep 98.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel R. Berger, "A Chance for Peace," Washington Post, 21 Oct 98, A19.

<sup>14</sup> The "Sicog" model was presented at the School of Advanced Airpower Studies. It was a construct proposed by Robert A. Pace, "Identification of Coercive Air Strategies," in an yet-to-be published (in 1995) book, Punishment and Denial.



Rationale Targeting tanks and artillery pieces (air defense assets hit first to enable follow-on strikes) NATO hopes to threaten Milosevic's ability to continue the military crackdown against the Kosovars

Problem with logic Police do most of the killing with hand-fired weapons, lighters do the worst humanitarian damage Yugoslav forces (readily augmented) outnumber KLA forces 55 to 1 Truly, airpower will not be able to effect the actual ability of Milosevic to effect killing or humanitarian abuses, or to prevail in military confrontations with KLA forces Airpower could only offer to reduce the "efficiency" of his effort This strategy does not address KLA's military aggression

Branches & Sequels Separatists might be strengthened by an attack and encouraged in their independence efforts If airstrikes *could* significantly reduce Milosevic's current military superiority, the KLA would quickly fill the power vacuum

*Airpower > Military stockpiles in Kosovo or Serbia > **Punishment** > Milosevic's source of military power is reduced to the point that he prefers NATO demands*

Rationale Milosevic appears to value power above all else Damaging his perceived political status and actual military power in the minds of Yugoslavs and especially with the dominant ethnic Serbs might force him to submit to our will

Problem with logic The true source of Milosevic's military power is outside the province of Kosovo However, it is highly unlikely that NATO political consensus would allow such attacks, especially given Russian concerns Therefore his true source of military power is protected

Branches & Sequels Milosevic's greatest political challenge comes from the right, not from the left. If Milosevic loses political clout with ethnic Serbs, it is likely that the hardliner opposition will be strengthened.

*Either Denial or Punishment argument*

Problem with logic Stopping the current killing might be possible. But creating an environment where two ethnic groups steeped in centuries of conflict can coexist will take a long-term commitment of ground forces. This action is not consistent with what the US appears willing to commit to (short-term rather than protracted.)

Branches & Sequels Once American ordinance is fired, US prestige is clearly at stake. If airstrikes do compel Milosevic to comply with NATO demands, then US troops will be sent as part of the 2,000-person observer force and the Macedonia rapid reaction force. NATO's political objectives are not consistent with the Kosovar's political objectives, and they could easily upset the balance. KLA forces, disguised as Serbs, would just have to inflict casualties on the international observer force. These unarmed "verifiers" would quickly be removed from the province and the western coalition would resume military action against the Serbs. The Albanian independence movement gains momentum anew.

Clausewitz in On War left us a warning that appears very appropriate in the current Balkans conflict. The "most far-reaching act of judgment" for the statesman and commander alike is to establish the kind of war [conflict] on which they are embarking, 'neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.'<sup>15</sup> It would appear that NATO is about to embark into a conflict that they desire to be short-

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<sup>15</sup> Clausewitz, p. 88

term and no-casualty, but which promises to be protracted and violent<sup>16</sup> The mechanism between military strategy and political objectives doesn't appear clear Finally, Milosevic or the Kosovars could react to our military actions in ways that would undermine our political objectives and involve us much deeper in the conflict Both sides further their goals by continuing ethnic conflict Milosevic uses the Kosovo uprising to generate nationalistic support for his policies and to increase his power Kosovar separatists use Milosevic's reprisals to bring international attention to their pursuit of independence and to radicalize the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo and abroad The resolution of the conflict at this time would not be advantageous to either side

The United States is at a crossroads and an American consensus must be reached Either we become involved in this ethnic conflict consistent with the true character of the conflict (protracted) and expend military might, or we realize that the type of conflict we would chose to fight will ultimately become a failure

President Clinton's Balkan policy and leadership "by stealth"<sup>17</sup> are inappropriate The American public should be willing to support a long-term strategy of commitment to ensure Balkan stability and suppress bloody ethnic conflict before our warplanes launch on their missions Not clearly addressing possible consequences of action or inaction will ultimately result in American surprise, dismay, and failure Airstrikes in the proposed situation will simply be symbolic and meant to send a political signal to the adversary It would appear that the statesman and the soldier are trying to turn the Balkan conflict into "something alien to its nature "

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<sup>16</sup> See Attachments 1/ 2 for a my analysis of the character and conduct of the conflict from each side

<sup>17</sup> Jim Hoagland, "Into the Balkans," Washington Post, 25 Oct 98 C07

## EPILOGUE

It would appear that the second part of my thesis has been proven incorrect. The threat of airpower did force our adversary to conform to our will, fulfilling our political objectives. As of the 27<sup>th</sup> of October, President Milosevic apparently has withdrawn his forces consistent with NATO demands, stopped the killing, agreed to accept a 2,000 person observer force, and approved a timeline for Kosovo elections. It is unclear if the successful mechanism was one of threatening “denial” or “punishment” or something different or in between.

Unfortunately, I don’t believe that Milosevic’s actions have invalidated this paper. NATO’s involvement in this conflict is just beginning. The larger question remains as to the nature of the conflict on which we are embarking and ultimately military action may well be reconsidered. We may still have time for the American public to “buy in” to the possible consequences of political objectives we desire. The consequences will not be easy, without cost, or quick.

## **KOSOVO**

### Character

Unlimited objectives (political independence)  
Protracted war  
Trying to cultivate "People's War"  
Strategic defensive, tactical offensive

### Conduct

Guerrilla hit-and-run operations against authorities  
Inflict casualties, rather than gain territory  
Expand rebel forces

### Key Assumptions

An uninterrupted flow of weapons across an unprotectable border  
Financial support from sympathetic international Albanians  
International pressure to temper the military response of Serbian forces

### KLA Center of Gravity for Serbs

KLA's international support/attention  
KLA forces

## **SERB**

### Character

Unlimited objectives (prevent the loss of a portion of their country)  
Prefer a near-term resolution, though prepared for protracted operations  
Strategic offensive to destroy rebel forces  
Remove the ethnic Albanian civilian support for rebel activities (punish civilians)

### Conduct

Regular forces (police and army)  
Punish civilians through terror and dislocation  
Secure territory

### Key Assumptions

Serb forces stronger and more plentiful (less precious)  
Strong crackdown in Kosovo serves to bolster Milosevic's power base in Serbia

### Serb Center of Gravity for KLA

Serbian human rights violations (highlighted by the international media)

## **NATO as seen through UNITED STATES eyes**

### Character

Limited objectives

Seeks short term solution

### Conduct

Very narrow range of responses allowed (airstrikes against tanks or artillery pieces, small/unarmed peacekeeping force)

No combat forces on the ground

Punish Milosevic for aggression against ethnic Albanians

Destroy vulnerable Serb military hardware in Kosovo

### Key Assumptions

American people will not support the expenditure of US casualties in this conflict

International consensus for UN military action is tenuous

Military strikes outside Kosovo would be very problematic

International community does not support the succession of Kosovo from FRY

### UN Center of Gravity for Serbia (prohibit attacks)

International consensus for UN military action (Russia, ??? key players)

### UN Center of Gravity for KLA (encourage attacks)

International media coverage of atrocities

### Serb Center of Gravity for UN

Milosevic

### Proposed UN Solution

Serbia reduce police and army forces in Kosovo to February (pre-crackdown) levels

18,000 Yugoslav army troops reduced to 12,500

11,000 Serbian paramilitary policemen reduced to 6,500

Posting of 2,000 international observers to monitor Serbian and KLA compliance

Posting of "quick reaction" force in Macedonia for safety of international observers

Includes 300 non-combat US communications troops

Ensure a political settlement giving Kosovo partial autonomy under ethnic Albanian rule

Elections to be held in Kosovo in summer of 1999